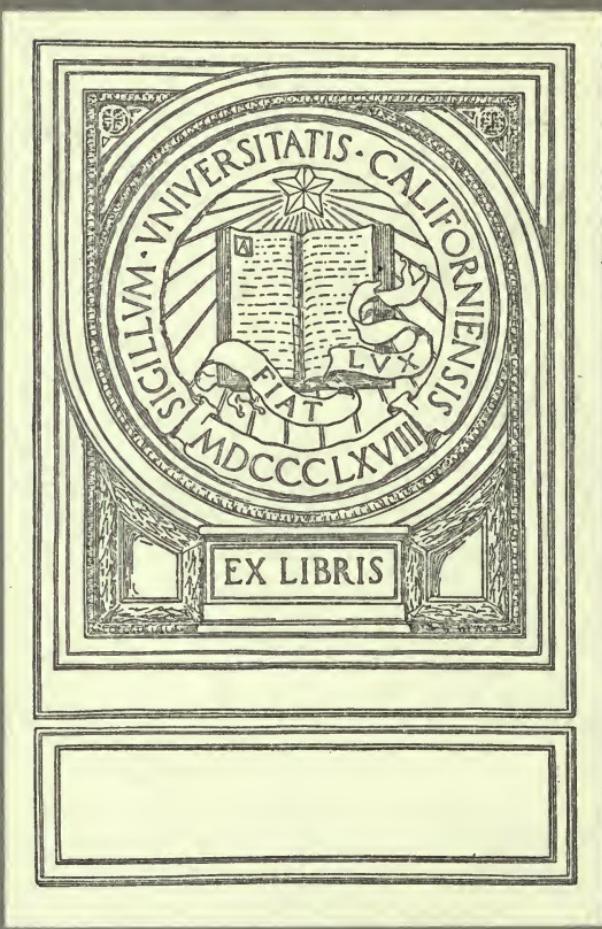


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II. DISARMAMENT ON THE GREAT LAKES

The Anglo-American agreement for disarmament on the Great Lakes is the striking historical example of the kind of benefits which the conference for Limitation of Armament is in a position to confer on the world. This summer there has been erected on the far western section of the American-Canadian border a memorial gate to celebrate the centenary of an agreement which, while technically only restricting vessels of war on the Great Lakes, has in practice resulted in 3,000 miles of unfortified land border. The terms of the agreement were obsolete generations ago, but its existence at a time when its terms meant something had the effect of diverting the minds of two peoples from the idea of mutual hostility; and the habits then formed have grown decade by decade. There is scarcely a sentence of it which applies to anything which could be termed armament to-day. There is no mention in it of land armament. But that agreement has brought it about that for more than a century the sword has not been a make-weight in Canadian-American questions. The letter of the agreement of 1817 died years ago from a disease called the progress of naval science; its spirit has apparently taken a lease of eternal life, thanks to the good will of which it was both the effect and the cause.¹

The initiative for the unarmed border of to-day seems to have come originally from Edmund Randolph, Washington's Secretary of State, who in instructions to John Jay of May 6, 1794, in connection with the negotiation of the commercial treaty of that year, suggested as one of the objects of it that "in peace, no troops be kept within a limited distance from the Lakes."²

The idea was not pursued at that time and came up again in the instructions of Lord Castlereagh to the English negotiators of the treaty of Ghent. It was not then discussed except that the British sought to have the United States withdraw all of its forces from the Great Lakes.

¹For a full account of the origin of the agreement and its subsequent history see "Disarmament on the Great Lakes" by Charles H. Levermore (World Peace Foundation, Pamphlet Series, IV, No. 4).

²American State Papers, Foreign Relations, I, 473.

After the War of 1812, the United States wished to retire its armed vessels from the Lakes for reasons of enforced economy; but the British tended to increase armament there, because their ships would be pocketed in the Lakes if trouble should again arise. As a result, President Madison sent the following instructions to John Quincy Adams, American minister to England:

The information you give of orders having been issued by the British Government to increase its naval force on the Lakes is confirmed by intelligence from that quarter of measures having been actually adopted for the purpose.

It is evident, if each party augments its force there with a view to obtain the ascendancy over the other, that vast expense will be incurred and the danger of collision augmented in like degree. The President is sincerely desirous to prevent an evil which, it is presumed, is equally to be deprecated by both Governments. He, therefore, authorizes you to propose to the British Government such an arrangement respecting the naval force to be kept on the Lakes by both Governments as will demonstrate their pacific policy and secure their peace. He is willing to confine it on each side to a certain moderate number of armed vessels, and the smaller the number the more agreeable to him; or to abstain altogether from an armed force beyond that used for the revenue. You will bring this subject under the consideration of the British Government immediately after the receipt of this letter.

THE ARGUMENT THAT STARTED IT

Adams did not get an opportunity to bring up the matter with Lord Castlereagh until January 25, 1816. The subject matter of the interview is reported by Adams himself in his journal, where it is stated that he opened the conversation by saying:

"A circumstance of still more importance is the increase of the British armaments, since the peace, on the Canadian Lakes. Such armaments on one side render similar and counter-armaments indispensable on the other. Both Governments must thus be subjected to a heavy and in time of peace a useless expense, and every additional armament creates new and very dangerous incitements to irritation and acts of hostility. The American Government, anxious above all for the preservation of peace, has authorized me to propose a reduction of the armaments upon the Lakes on both sides. The extent of the reduction the President leaves at the pleasure of Great Britain, observing that the greater

it is the more it will conform to his preference, and that it would best of all suit the United States if the armaments should be confined to what is necessary for the protection of the revenue."

Lord Castlereagh replied: "Does your Government mean to include in this proposition the destruction of the ships already existing there? As to keeping a number of armed vessels parading about the Lakes in time of peace, it would be absurd. There can be no motive for it, and everything beyond what is necessary to guard against smuggling is calculated only to produce mischief. The proposition you make is very fair, and, so far as it manifests pacific dispositions, I assure you, will meet with the sincerest reciprocal dispositions of this Government. I will submit the proposal to their consideration. But you know we are the weaker part there. Therefore it was that we proposed at Ghent that the whole Lakes should belong to one party—all the shores; for then armaments would not have been necessary. Then there would have been a large and wide natural separation between the two territories; and those, I think, are the best and most effectual to preserve peace."

Mr. Adams rejoined: "But the proposition at Ghent to which we objected was that the disarming should be all on one side. There was indeed afterward intimated to us by the British plenipotentiaries an intention to make us a proposal so fair and reasonable that it was thought no objection could be made against it. We did suppose that it was this identical proposition which I am now authorized to make. It was not, however, brought forward, nor was any explanation given by the British plenipotentiaries of what they had intended by their offer. My instructions now do not explicitly authorize me to include in the agreement to keep up no armaments the destruction of the vessels already there; but, if this Government assents to the principle, there will be ample time to concert mutually all the details. What I could now agree to would be to have no armed force actually out upon the Lakes, and to build no new vessels."

Lord Castlereagh: "It so happened that just at the close of the war we were obliged to make extraordinary exertions there, and to build a number of new vessels to maintain our footing there."

Mr. Adams: "But it is the new armaments since the peace which have necessarily drawn the attention of my Government."

Lord Castlereagh: "You have so much the advantage of us by being there, immediately on the spot, that you can always, even in a shorter time than we can, be prepared for defense."

Mr. Adams: "The stipulation to keep or build no new armed force during the peace would therefore be in favor of Great Britain, because the very act of arming would then be an act of hostility."

Lord Castlereagh: "That is, there could be no arming until the war actually commenced, and then you would have such an advance of time upon us by your position that we should not stand upon an equal footing for defense."

Mr. Adams: "Still the operation of the engagement would be in favor of Great Britain. We should have our hands tied until the moment of actual war, a state which it is impossible should suddenly arise on our part. It is impossible that war should be commenced by us without a previous state of things which would give ample notice to this country to be prepared. She might then have everything in readiness to commence her armament upon the Lakes at the same moment with us, and we should be deprived of the advantage arising from our local position."

Lord Castlereagh: "Well, I will propose it to the Government for consideration."¹

HOW THEY COMPARED NOTES

Adams brought up the question again on March 21, and Castlereagh on April 9 informed him that the British Government would accept the "proposal of the American Government that there might be no unnecessary naval force upon the Lakes in active service or in commission, so that there would be nothing like the appearance of a dispute which side should have the strongest force there. The armed vessels might be laid up, as they called it here, in ordinary. It was in short the disposition of the British Government fully to meet the proposition made to them, and the only armed force which they should want to have in service might be vessels for conveying troops occasionally from one station to another."

It will be noted that these exchanges were occurring at the very time when Castlereagh was discussing the question of European reduction of armament with the Russian Government.

¹Adams, *Memoirs*, III, 287-288.

Charles Bagot, British minister at Washington, was instructed to open negotiations with Secretary of State Monroe and did so on July 26, Monroe replying on August 2 with definite propositions. Bagot referred these to London and on November 4, 1816, submitted the following statement to Secretary Monroe:

**STATEMENT OF HIS MAJESTY'S NAVAL FORCE ON THE LAKES OF
CANADA, SEPTEMBER 1, 1816**

ON LAKE ONTARIO

St. Lawrence, can carry 110 guns, laid up in ordinary.

Psyche, can carry 50 guns, laid up in ordinary.

Princess Charlotte, can carry 40 guns, laid up in ordinary.

Niagara, can carry 20 guns, condemned as unfit for service.

Charwell, can carry 14 guns, hauled up in the mud; condemned likewise.

Prince Regent, can carry 60 guns, in commission, but unequipped, being merely used as a barrack or receiving ship and the commander-in-chief's headquarters.

Montreal, in commission, carrying 6 guns; used merely as a transport for the service of His Majesty.

Star, carrying 4 guns; used for current duties only, and unfit for actual service.

Netley, schooner, carrying no guns; attached for the most part to the surveyors, and conveying His Majesty's servants from port to port. There are, besides the above, some rowboats, capable of carrying long guns; two 74-gun ships on the stocks, and one transport of 400 tons, used for conveying His Majesty's stores from port to port.

ON LAKE ERIE

Tecumseh and *Newark*, carrying 4 guns each; and *Huron* and *Sauk*, which can carry 1 gun each. These vessels are used principally to convey His Majesty's servants and stores from port to port.

ON LAKE HURON

The *Confiance* and *Surprise*, schooners, which may carry 1 gun each, and are used for purposes of transport only.

ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN

12 gunboats, 10 of which are laid up in ordinary and the other 2 (one of which mounts 4 guns and the other 3 guns) used as guard-boats. Besides the above there are some small rowboats, which are laid up

as unfit for service. Keel, stem, and stern-post of a frigate laid down at the Isle aux Noix.

(Signed) J. BAUMGARDT.
Capt. of His Majesty's ship "Prince Regent,"
and senior officer.

Secretary Monroe furnished Mr. Bagot November 7, 1816, with a similar statement of the American naval forces:

ON LAKE ONTARIO

Brig *Jones* (18 guns). Retained for occasional service. Schooner *Lady of the Lake* (1 gun). Employed in aid of the revenue laws.

Ship *New Orleans* (74 guns). On the stocks, building suspended.

Ship *Chippewa* (74 guns). On the stocks, building suspended.

Ships *Superior* (44 guns), *Mohawk* (32 guns), *General Pike* (24 guns), *Madison* (18 guns); and the brigs *Jefferson* (18 guns), *Sylph* (16 guns) and *Oneida* (18 guns). Dismantled.

Schooner *Raven*. Receiving vessel.

15 barges (each 1 gun). Laid up for preservation.

ON LAKE ERIE

Schooners *Porcupine* and *Ghent* (each 1 gun). Employed in transporting stores.

Ship *Detroit* (18 guns) and brigs *Lawrence* (20 guns) and *Queen Charlotte* (14 guns). Sunk at Erie.

Brig *Niagara* (18 guns). Dismantled at Erie.

ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN

Ships *Confiance* (32 guns) and *Saratoga* (22 guns); brigs *Eagle* (12 guns) and *Sinnet* (16 guns); the schooner *Ticonderoga* (14 guns) and 6 galleys (each 1 gun). All laid up at Whitehall.

AGREEMENT PROCLAIMED

On April 28, 1817, Minister Bagot forwarded to Secretary of State Richard Rush the terms which Great Britain was willing to accept in accordance with the proposal of the preceding August 2. An identic note was returned the next day and the agreement was complete. The correspondence was sent to the Senate and approved with no dissenting vote on April 16, 1818. On the first anniversary of the exchange of notes April 28, 1818, James Monroe as President issued the essential text in a proclamation which follows:

**BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
A PROCLAMATION**

Whereas, an arrangement was entered into at the city of Washington in the month of April, in the year of our Lord 1817, between Richard Rush, esquire, at that time acting as Secretary for the Department of State of the United States, for and in behalf of the Government of the United States, and the Right Honorable Charles Bagot, His Britannic Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary for and in behalf of His Britannic Majesty, which arrangement is in the words following, to wit:

"The naval force to be maintained upon the American lakes by His Majesty and the Government of the United States shall henceforth be confined to the following vessels on each side, that is,—

"On Lake Ontario to one vessel, not exceeding to 100 tons burden, and armed with one 18-lb. cannon;

"On the Upper Lakes to 2 vessels, not exceeding like burden, each armed with like force;

"On the waters of Lake Champlain, to one vessel, not exceeding like burden, and armed with like force;

"All other armed vessels on those lakes shall be forthwith dismantled, and no other vessels of war shall be there built or armed.

"If either party should be hereafter desirous of annulling this stipulation, and should give notice to that effect to the other party, it shall cease to be binding after the expiration of six months from the date of such notice.

"The naval force so to be limited shall be restricted to such service as will in no respect interfere with the proper duties of the armed vessels of the other party."

And whereas the Senate of the United States has approved of the said arrangement, and recommended that it should be carried into effect, the same having also received the sanction of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, acting in the name and on the behalf of His Britannic Majesty,

Now, therefore, I, James Monroe, President of the United States, do, by this my proclamation, make known and declare that the arrangement aforesaid, and every stipulation thereof, has been duly entered into, concluded and confirmed, and is of full force and effect.

Given under my hand, at the city of Washington, this 28th day of April, in the year of our Lord, 1818, and of the independence of the United States the forty-second.

JAMES MONROE.¹

By the President:

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, *Secretary of State.*

¹Malloy, *Treaties and Conventions*, I, 630.

That is all there is to the agreement which for more than a century has in practice precluded war between two neighbors which have had a fair amount of provocation for friction and which have the longest conterminous boundary line in the world.

How It MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN DONE

It is not to be supposed that the militarists of that day any more than of this did not have an alternative plan for securing peace. On the contrary, then as now they had ideas and were in a position to express them. The British Foreign Office was not alone in considering the defense of Canada in 1816; it was simply in a more feasible position to act. While Lord Castlereagh was working up the Anglo-American Agreement with the American Government, his colleague, Lord Bathurst, at the Colonial Office was engaged in a scheme to secure the defense of Canada by creating a wilderness along the boundary lines. On July 1, 1816, Bathurst sent from the Colonial Office to the new governor of Canada, Sir John Sherbrooke, a letter instructing him to abstain from issuing any more grants of land in the districts along that frontier, and, if possible, to induce those who already had grants there "to accept uncleared lands in other districts more distant from the frontier of the United States. . . . It is also very desirable that you should, as far as lies in your power, prevent the extension of roads in the direction of those particular districts . . . ; and if any means should present themselves of letting those which have been already made fall into decay, you will best comply with the views of His Majesty's Government, and materially contribute to the future security of the Province by their adoption."

This plan of making a wilderness and calling it peace was actually attempted. On the map there was laid out a 20-mile strip along the northern boundaries of Vermont and New York which was to be made into nothing. The process was attempted simultaneously with the operation of the Agreement of 1817. It took the scheme five years to fail. The Earl of Dalhousie, who had come out two years before as Governor-in-Chief of Canada and the Maritime Provinces, reported to Lord Bathurst in 1821 that the strip in question contained a considerable and increasing population, who were offering protection to all criminals escaping from either Canada or the United States, and that American lum-

bermen were settling where they pleased and taking what they pleased. He therefore requested authority to grant again those fertile lands to loyal subjects for immediate settlement. The authority was apparently given.

ARMAMENT VS. PROSPERITY

Just at the close of the Civil War, the movement for the establishment of Canadian self-government was taking shape. There is an interesting letter of Lieut.-Colonel Jervois to the British Secretary of State for War with reference to the defense of Canada, which presents the military arguments for a strong Canadian militia, arguments which were made more positive perhaps in view of the fact that in 1861 the Canadian Legislative Assembly had thrown out on its second reading a proposal to establish an active militia of 50,000 men. The reasons were stated in a report of September 30, 1862:

They [the people of Canada] feel that, should war occur [with the United States], it will be produced by no act of theirs, and they have no inclination to do anything that may seek to foreshadow, perhaps to provoke, a state of things which would be disastrous to every interest of the Province. On this ground their representatives in Parliament assembled rejected the proposition to organize 50,000 men, or indeed to commit the Province to a much smaller force.¹

On June 17, 1865, Edward Cardwell, M.P., reported to the British Government a memorandum answer to various questions which his Commission had been instructed to investigate in Canada. The second question was: "Upon the arrangements necessary for the defense of Canada in the event of war arising with the United States and the extent to which the same should be shared between Great Britain and Canada." The fifth question reported upon was "the existing critical state of affairs by which Canada is most seriously affected."

Simultaneously, a Canadian civilian commission headed by Sir John A. Macdonald was conferring with the London Government upon these questions and the larger one of the Confederation of the British North American provinces into the Dominion of Canada. Their report was filed at Quebec in July, 1865, together

¹Canada. Parliament. *Sessional Papers*, Vol. 1 (1867-68), Part 9, No. 63, Supplement, p. 5.

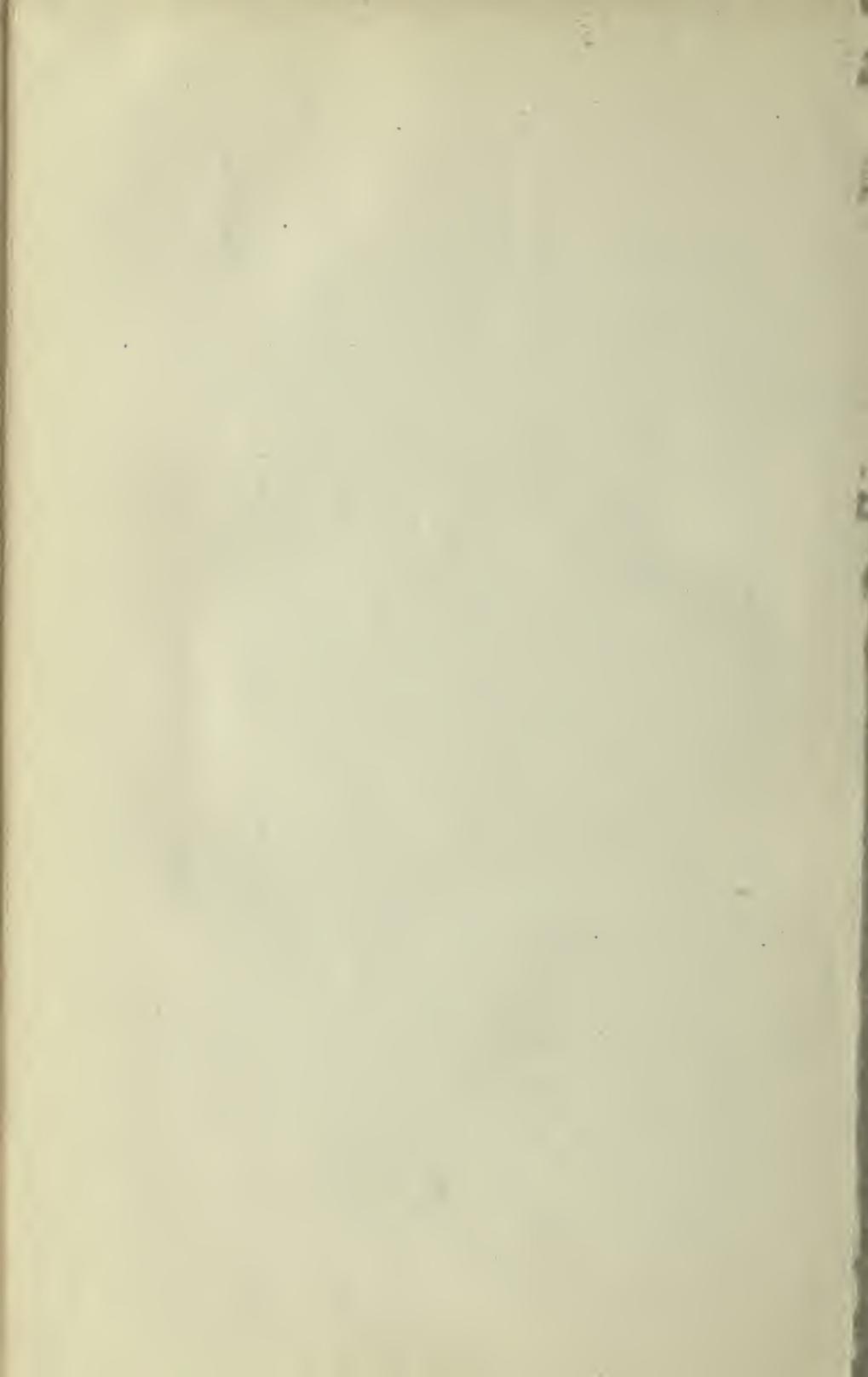
with a memorandum prepared by the Executive Council of the Provinces in reply to the proposals of the Imperial Government. This memorandum is one of the fundamental documents upon which the British North America Act, the constitution of the Dominion of Canada, was based. The Executive Council in it referred to the many difficulties and complications then existing with the Government of the United States. But they effectively pointed out to the British Government that

while fully recognizing the necessity of—and while prepared to provide for—such a system of defense as would restore confidence in our future at home and abroad, the best ultimate defense for British America is to be found in the increase of her population as rapidly as possible and the husbanding of our resources to that end; and without claiming it as a right, we venture to suggest that by enabling us to throw open the Northwest Territory to free settlement, and by aiding us in enlarging our canals and prosecuting internal productive works, and by promoting an extensive plan of emigration from Europe into the unsettled portions of our domain, permanent security will be more quickly and economically achieved than by any other means.¹

The agreement has weathered other storms, and at times its existence has been brought into doubt. Raids have occurred across the border. Shipbuilders on the Lakes have wanted to build battleships and other vessels of war. Once the United States started out to denounce it, and then confirmed it by an exchange of notes, though Congress had ratified the notice of abrogation. Once also the Secretary of State decided it was obsolete, though still in force. And yet it lives. Only the revenue cutters and the border police use official firearms from Eastport, Maine, to Cape Flattery, Washington.

¹Canada. Parliament. *Sessional Papers*, Vol. 1 (1867-68), Part 9, No. 63, p. 14. Other documents are to be found in *Parliamentary Papers* 1865, 3434 and 3535, Vol. XXXVII, 429-36 and 437-40.

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